

"The Paliser Case," by Saltus

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

THE genius of Edgar Saltus is his masterly insincerity. He doesn't believe in himself, in the people he writes about, in the world he depicts, in you or me, or anything. He is a balancer, a juggler, a Houdini of phrases, a Gargantuan Capocomico who balances the Toj Mahal on his nose, the Alhambra and St. Peter's on his skull and tosses buddhas and bonzes, bibles and sultans in vast circles like eggs, precisely sure of never missing one, while the orchestra thunders a Valkyrian battle charge toward the Gates of Nowhere—an orchestra conducted by Searamouch.

But only the profoundly sincere in spirit can enter the Kingdom of Insincerity. The Wildes, the Chestertons, the Hunekers, the Anatole Franceses, the Shaws and the Renans are to the manner born. They may play battledore and shuttlecock with everything because they are everything—and nothing; they have the frivolous, ironic gaiety of Nature, who emits swallows and earthquakes and bluebells and pests and lunatics and fairies and passes on with a sublime indifference.

Their imitators come along; then we see an elephant trying to play Butterfly; Bottom doing Puck's tricks. Insincerity is the final sense of humor—it is the laughter of the nihilist from the chimney of the House of Life, where he plays with the toments, the stars and the blind bats of chance.

We urge Mr. Saltus to give up novel writing and write a pamphlet on *The Decay of Insincerity*. Was there ever a time when the world needed it more than now? The sane and the simple are a menace to the race, a killjoy at the orgy of existence. Sanity and simplicity are the prime curses of civilization. They are the masks of blackguards and social saviors. To be in earnest is really a defect of the understanding. It is a kind of lunacy wherein a fixed idea blankets the brain and smoothes the admirable incoherences of life to a smug symmetry and proportion. It is the sincere people that make life stupid and irksome. Hypocrisy and insincerity are arts—and alas! it seems that it is given to genius alone to achieve them in their perfection.

These insincere thoughts were bred in me by reading Edgar Saltus's new book, *The Paliser Case*. I said that I read it—but that was an unconscious lapse into honesty, an atavistic tendency to tell the truth without regard to facts. Did I read it or did I not? Shall I say I did read it if I really did not? Or shall I say I did not read when I did read it, and thereby do a little posing? Well, as to whether I read it or not I will leave to the reader. I should worry!

At the beginning of the book I noticed that "Marty Paliser had been murdered." At the end of the book I noticed that "the Paliser case ended before it began." Between these two statements lies the problem. The story is laid in New York. It is a story that brings in many of Saltus's old characters—always young, full of epigrams, burgundy and philosophic frou-frou. That the story is great I have no doubt—Edgar Saltus wrote it. That it is told in English that no other living American can use I have no doubt, hav-

ing read all that Saltus has written. That it is brilliant is a matter of course.

The jacket on the book says "This is not the great American novel." How do the publishers know? I believe it is. There is every reason why it should be. Nobody knows the American like Edgar Saltus, no one is surer of his ground when he delves into the New Yorker's soul. But probably it is too well written to be the great American novel. English words are not yet understood in America and imaginative English is "highbrow."

The Paliser Case, whether you believe I have read it or not, is one of the most fascinating pieces of fiction of the time. Whether I am sincere or not in this verdict is of no importance. Read it and dare to go to sleep over it!

THE PALISER CASE. By EDGAR SALTUS. Boni & Liveright. \$1.50.

"The Son of Pio"

By BARRETT H. CLARK.

THE SON OF PIO, a novel of the Philippines, by C. L. Carlsen, may well be called a "rattling good story" with nearly all the elements of popular success, including a moving picture ending. In spite of this last the story is well worth reading.

If in reading *The Son of Pio* I was constantly reminded of how much better Conrad could have written the book, I mean no disparagement to Mr. Carlsen. He has a perfect right to trespass on Lord Jim's territory; he may wander at will in the tropics; but then I cannot help wishing that the author of *Victory* had written the book. In other words my chief complaint against *The Son of Pio* is that it is written in the popular style that comes near spoiling so many otherwise distinguished novels. It is not bad, it is merely colorless and a trifle outworn. The adjectives are a little tired and pale.

The ingredients of the story are exposed in moving picture style on the jacket of the book as follows:

"Background: An inland village in the Philippines.

"Time: During the American occupation—about 1906.

"Characters: Hero; Pacifico (the son of Pio), a native lad with an ambition to be a 'brown American.'

Heroine: Emiliana, a pretty native girl with an ambition to marry Pacifico.

Villains: El Senor Presidente Don Miguel Lasan, governor of the district, with an ambition to get out of his people all they can be made to part with, and incidentally to make things unpleasant for those he dislikes, particularly Pacifico.

Others: Kindly, inefficient Pio, the American Teacher, &c."

Pacifico, the hero, is the best piece of character analysis in the book. I feel that Mr. Carlsen knows what he is writing about and loves the boy well enough to take the pains necessary to make him a vital figure. Pacifico, under the influence of the William S. Hart American *El Dangeroso*, is a most interesting study of the half savage ignorant, within whose breast burns the desire to become a true American.

Throughout the book I cannot escape the feeling that Mr. Carlsen is writing with a purpose beyond the legitimate scope of the novelist; I can detect the American pointing out the way toward a better administration of justice to the Filipinos, and I must confess I feel just a little sorry for the natives. The American teacher, a brusque, good hearted fellow with ingrained prejudices fully as absurd in their way as the Filipino "customs," rules by force; he believes that his reforms are improvements and he will succeed with most readers in making his point because his enemies are so absurdly vicious; but the argument is far from sound. If he represents civilization (though I think his civilization is the civilization set forth in our Western motion pictures) then allow me to put in a word for the poor uncivilized Filipino.

It is Mr. Carlsen's fault if I have been led to digress, but *The Son of Pio* does make one think; I am grateful to him. Likewise for his "rattling good story" and his characters. I am sure he will write a far better story if he forgets for a moment the magazine reader and tells us everything he knows in his own way.

THE SON OF PIO. By C. L. CARLSEN. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.75.

"Crater's Gold"

By DOROTHY SCARBOROUGH.

CRATER'S GOLD, by E. Philip Curtiss, is a delightful farrago of sense and nonsense, of realism and melodrama, of New England and Broadway. Many people will find pleasure in reading it for varied reasons—some for the love story with its refreshing economy of sentiment, some for the tantalizing mystery that perpetually recurs to tease the reader, some for the clever characterization of the persons and personages that stroll through the events, and some for the entertaining dialogue. One gets the worth of his money anyhow in this story that ran serially in *Harper's Magazine* before being published in book form.

The opening paragraph gives an idea of the quaint contrasts to be found in the book.

"Stiles sat in his study smoking his breakfast pipe and pondered the merits of being rich. For this train of thought his setting was rather enchanting, as there was not a thing in the room which was not disreputable, not even his coat. There were holes in the carpet, the wall paper sagged in strips, while the chair in which he was sitting was a chair, but that was about as far as one felt like going. Yet, curiously, Stiles really was rich. He had been for just three weeks, and those three weeks had been devoted wholly to seeing how near a human being could come to complete inertia.

"Theoretically Stiles wanted nothing to happen—ever. For fifteen years of his life things had done nothing but happen. He had made up his mind to forestall anything more in that line, but—"

The characters are both lifelike and interesting. There's Mrs. Fields, the housekeeper, whom we first see as she goes to answer a ring at the door. "Mrs. Fields with an effect of tiptoe and a look of hate. (It was ironing day.) There's Baumgar-

ten, with his mouth that opened and shut like that of a fish, and his patronizing air. There's Pullar, the agent, interested in the innards of motors and in trout flies, and Judge Tyler, in reality only justice of the peace, who looks like a rare old boy who would read Boswell and have memories of personal acquaintance with Henry Clay, but who "the moment he opened his mouth, disclosed himself as a nasal old rustie who seemed to know very little and was determined not to know more." There is, of course, Eksberger, the Eksberger of Broadway, and Rose Fuller, the actress.

"In a Broadway restaurant Eksberger would have been a man to look at twice, to wonder who he was and then ask the waiter; in the big foreign car with veils from her hat Miss Fuller was the last note in languid sophistication; yet here in the musty, provincial parlor they both looked suddenly crude, almost coarse lined. Stiles wondered. There must be something in the Ten Commandments and Plymouth Rock after all."

Stiles is an ex-newspaper man who owns the temperamental estate on which eccentric events happen.

The plot has a deal of suspense and a surprise meets the reader in every chapter. This newspaper man who has inherited an old New England place from an uncle, finds various persons suddenly and unaccountably desirous of buying it from him. None will explain his eagerness. Other curious occurrences are the finding of a wallet containing \$10,000, the midnight wanderings of an ancient housekeeper and the discovery of an old manuscript. The very soil behaves queerly, swallowing up a motor car and cattle and revealing underground labyrinths. *Crater's Gold* is well worth reading.

CRATER'S GOLD. By E. PHILIP CURTISS. Harper & Brothers. \$1.50.

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